

"OVER THE BOOK-COUNTER" IN THE BUSY CHRISTMAS SEASON.

Character Studies of the Buyers of the "Latest Fiction" and of Other Books of All Kinds.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC. During the "Christmas rush" the book store is a place well worth visiting, were it only to study types.

If in one particular more than another men and women lay bare their true selves, it is in their book tastes. Reading, after all, is a matter of kill time or use time, a habit or an occupation. Very few books can be all things to all men, and hence, the many, many grades in even the one department of books—fiction.

Good, bad and indifferent books are deliberately put forth by the publishers to meet the demands of persons good, bad and indifferent in their literary tastes. All these good, bad and indifferent persons are to be seen at the book counter buying their mental opiates or stimulants, purchasing information or dream pills. They jostle each other, handle the books, comment upon them, sometimes purchasing, sometimes not, but in the end contributing to their hard-earned money to the vast sum spent in the United States annually, which keeps the writers writing, the poets poetizing, the printers printing and the publishers publishing.

Day by day, after December 1, business is stirred to a higher and livelier note in the bookseller's shops until it reached the climax the day before Christmas.

Then a slump. Then new novels no longer are new. Presents are bought. The light literature appetite temporarily is sated; and to the popular mind—all that literature includes is summed up in light literature.

The Girl with the Big Boa was in Roeder's with her bosom friend, The Girl with the Frizzly Hair.

The name of the Girl with the Big Boa was Gwendolyn, given for short. The name of the Girl with the Frizzly Hair was Helen, Nell for short.

The Girl with the Big Boa was tall and strikingly beautiful, having the kind of figure, features and coloring and carriage that takes one's breath away. The Girl with the Frizzly Hair was well, just the Girl with the Frizzly Hair—small, snub-nosed, not nearly so daintily dressed, is a sort of negative pole to the Girl with the Big Boa.

The Girl with the Big Boa charged down upon the Clerk with the Long Neck, who presided over the new novel counter.

"Are there any new novels?" she asked. The Clerk with the Long Neck, visibly impressed by his customer, pointed to the numberless volumes before him.

"All new, Miss," he replied. "What kind would you like? Now here's 'The Call of the Wild,' by Jack London, about a dog—"

"Oh, Gwendolyn," put in the Girl with the Frizzly Hair, who by this time had reached the scene, "don't buy anything by that Jack London; he's a Socialist, and that's the same as an Anarchist—I heard papa say so—even if he is good-looking."

"What on earth's the difference if he is a Socialist, so long as he's good-looking?" retorted the Girl with the Big Boa. "And are you sure—he is a Socialist?" This last directed at the Clerk with the Long Neck.

The clerk squirmed the long neck in embarrassment, being unable to answer. It was not his province to know the politics of authors, but, rather, to sell books.

However, the Girl with the Big Boa spared him. She didn't wait for answer. She picked up the book and opened it.

"Why, it is about a dog," she remarked surprisedly, unpleasant for the clerk since it intimated she doubted the truth of his original statement. "It's about a bulldog."

"That ought to settle it," he said, "but the Girl with the Frizzly Hair, 'bulldogs are the ugliest things. It's just like a Socialist to write about a bulldog.'"

Gwendolyn, who was in a loud whisper, looked at Minnie M. over there; she's not a new dress and it's just the ugliest thing. That girl never did have any taste."

"And if that isn't John W. with her?" exclaimed the Girl with the Big Boa excitedly. "What in the world can he see in that powdered creature? No, I don't want the book (with much asperity, to the utter humiliation of the Clerk with the Long



THE ST. LOUIS GIRL CROWDS STORES TO GET THE NEWEST BOOKS.

A Snapshot of "The Girl With the Big Boa" and Her Chum, "The Girl With the Frizzly Hair."

them—wanted Doctor Van Dyke's most recent endeavor. She wanted style for style sake, and, doubtless, had absorbed enough of popular misconceptions to understand the rules governing literature as "she is wrote."

I saw some quite ordinary people; people with ordinary common sense, who soberly picked out "The Autobiography of a Thief," "The Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson," "Henry Ward Beecher," by Lyman Abbott and the most recent studies of Schumann, Wagner and Brown-ing.

The Kipling enthusiast, how familiar he is becoming? Not the Kipling admirer. Not the Kipling reader, either, precisely. But he—it is always a man—who deems Kipling all the law and the gospel.

He walks as if animated by a dynamo of about 40,000 horse-power. His mustache has an aggressive twist, and he actually has those eyes which the romantic novelist unanimously declare have the quality of "piercing one." You must remember how the hero always pierces the villain with his, the hero's eyes. He does not understand repose. As the clerk with the long neck is looking up "The Five Nations," he paces to and fro, swinging his arms, and breathing at a pace that would put the habitual cigarette smoker out of business in half a minute.

He seems constantly to be saying to himself, "Kip, Kip, Hurrah!"

Food and drink—and then some more drink—lie for many men and women, who were foolish enough to get into the author business, in the insatiable appetite for more story, which nowadays is developed to abnormal proportions. Often a boy or girl, saturated first with nursery rhymes, then with tales of more or less coherence told by parents or nurse, literally grows up in an atmosphere of story.

They open a book and, from the moment that the craveller lover is introduced to the damsel of high degree and "passionate orbs," they glue their optics to the pages and bury themselves for hours in the theme. Just to find out what happens to the book's people. Through duels, through sieges, through wars, through vicissitudes without number, they follow the adventures of the central pair. They get themselves gradually to that state where they are distraught when the hero is distraught, where they weep when the heroine is crying her eyes out, imagining herself (pure imagination, of course) under unrelenting, deserted, helpless and in hard luck generally.

To reach this state of subservience to fiction, the victim after the nursery-rhyme experience, goes through the G. A. Henty stage, using him as typical of the better class of juvenile writing of the "thrilling adventure" description. He then reads Scott from beginning to end, the whole Waverley novel series; then Bulwer, and so on until he has exhausted the so-called "classic" stuff, and rushes constantly after the newest and wildest thing of the modern romantic kind.

These story maniacs are very prominent around the book stalls. They have a care for the exterior of the book which they purchase. The publishers understand them fully and, in the development of the bookbinding art, are able to, and do, put on the covers pictures of devilish-looking fellows chopping up people with swords or lances.

After binding, they consider illustrations. If the spirit of story be sufficiently strong and the illustrator's ability up to the mark, so that the tale's thrill speaks out and exerts its spell through the pictures, that book is very apt to be what is called a "seller."

As to the other kinds of buyers of other kinds of books, go downtown and see for yourself.

to look like a genius, sauntered up to the Clerk with the Long Neck.

"Dr. I presume," said he, "that you have W. D. Howells's latest 'Letters Home.' Er, let me see it please. Fine writer, Howells's classic, don't you know. You see I write for the magazine myself."

The Clerk with the Long Neck looked as if he had seen this kind before. But people's failing was not his business. His was to sell books. He secured a copy of the epistolary novel in question.

"Wonderfully clever, this. Howells has no clump about him. Some say he is uninteresting. Possibly not to the rabble. Literary tastes, er, require cultivation—like all other refinements. I'll just take this. How much? A dollar and a half. Yes, yes, here it is."

Money, of course, was no object. A modest appearing man, in neat black clothes, immaculate linen and black tie, sharp small eyes, compressed lips, expression adjusted at the well-known impossible, half-way between the benign and the severe—between the sublime and the ridiculous—a minister, Protestant. For what does he ask? "The One Woman," by Thomas Dixon.

And the book is barred at the Public Library.

A healthy, sane looking young woman, in whom the clerk with the Long Neck betrayed no interest whatever, in businesslike fashion bought a pretty bound little volume by James Lane Allen and another by Booth Tarkington.

An ambitious youth—ambition stuck out all over him—evidently proud of himself that his tastes should trend toward such a volume, asked for Morley's Gladstone.

An elderly man, erect, martial, white hair, goatee, mustache, Confederate Colonel all through, wanted "Henry Wattahson's latest book, huh!" The name?

"The Compromises of Life," huh. Your sellin' books, huh, and not knowin' Kunen Henry Wattahson, huh, reminds me of the boy, huh, who didn't know enough to come in out of the wet, huh."

A club woman—you can always tell

Neck. Her dress, awful! Nell, I'm going to get right out of this place. I never did like this store and I can't stand Minnie M., and that's all there is to it!"

This was all of the highly edifying conversation which was in any degree to be understood by an eavesdropper. It was seen, though, that the Girl with the Frizzly Hair hung diplomatically behind, and, judging by the quizzical expression of her face, was amused at the little pique of her friend. Evidently the Girl with the Big Boa was rather interested in John W.

To the credit of the said John W., be it said, that with excellent tact he bowed himself away from the engaging Minnie and in the most "accidental" way in the world intercepted the Girl with the Big Boa at the entrance to the store.

If I am not mistaken he invited her to go to the matinee. If I am not again mistaken she left her less attractive friend, the Girl with the Frizzly Hair, to the tender mercies of Minnie. If I am not furthermore mistaken Frizzly Hair and Minnie rushed, as it were, into each other's arms, and Frizzly Hair congratulated Minnie upon her "beautiful" new attire, while Minnie spoke of Frizzly Hair's extreme good looks, though poor little Frizzly Hair was inwardly conscious the whole time that all her charms were centered in frizzly hair and a generous amount of keen gray matter.

And the Clerk with the Long Neck. He sighed and reflected that a salesman's life is not one glorious round of the conquest of fair customers—nor of sales.

A gangling, strapping, tall and willowy—willowiness is a good sign in woman, had in man—with fishy eyes and too much lips, a fellow evidently strained by the attempt

PUBLIC LIBRARY'S PATRONS PREFER CLASSIC FICTION

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC. "One would think that the talked-of books, the new books, would be in greatest demand in a library having over 60,000 subscribers. Such is not the case.

"Generous advertising, parlor discussions and sensations rarely sweep the public off of what might be termed its literary feet.

The standard works remain the favorites, even when the new books are at their height of popularity."

F. M. Crunden, City Librarian, was talking. He had just left a large table covered with books fresh from the publishers. Many of them were the first copies that

had reached St. Louis. All of them had been purchased after a careful canvass of their merits by assistant librarians, Mr. Crunden, and finally the Book Committee of the Library Board.

Catering to the public taste in matters literary is no easy task. The city library has restrictions placed upon it that do not circumscribe a private institution such as the Mercantile Association. For instance, "The One Woman" is not to be secured at the public library.

"THE ONE WOMAN" IS RULED OUT.

"It's sensationalism is of such a nature that we thought we should not have it," was the explanation. Yet this same volume is having "the run" at the Mercantile Library, and nothing is thought of a possible proscription.

The selection of new books is not the all-important task of those who purchase books for the libraries. Keeping duplicates of standard works of fiction is one of the hardest jobs connected with the library. About 66 per cent of the books taken from the public library is fiction. At the Mercantile Library, strange to say, the per cent of fiction is 63, with a membership of about 3,500.

"It is not difficult to show which have been the popular new books of the last year," explained Mr. Crunden in telling of the tendency of the public taste in St. Louis. "Plays adapted from the new books have an appreciable effect on the demand."

"The Eternal City," Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch, "The Christian" and "Lady Rose's Daughter" appeared at the theaters and were co-incidental with a heavy demand for the books. All of these volumes are in vogue, and have been generally read.

"Last spring 'The Conqueror,' Gertrude Atherton's novel, was very popular. Allen's 'The Mistle of the Pasture,' London's 'The Call of the Wild,' and Mrs. Waddington's 'Letters of a Diplomat' were all popular. 'Gordon Keith' has also been much sought after. Fox's 'The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come' has been, and is, very much in favor."

"Popular as these books are, they do not approach the steady demand for 'Les Miserables,' 'Monte Cristo,' and such

works. For instance, when 'Tribby' was at its height of popularity—and every one remembers how it caught the public fancy—'Les Miserables' was even more popular."

"One year there were 500 calls for 'Tribby,' and the next year there were 800. In one of those years 'Les Miserables' was taken out 1,500 times."

"'Les Miserables' was the most popular book in the library. 'Monte Cristo' took first place the next year, with 'Les Miserables' second. Last year, for the first time in the history of the library, a new book led. It was 'The Crisis.'"

"Of course, the fact that the book dealt chiefly with events here in St. Louis was largely responsible for this difference. SOLD INFORMATION ALSO IS DESIRED."

"But it is not right to suppose that fiction is the chief attraction of the library. I do not think that a single book has been purchased during the past ten years which has not been called for by the patrons."

"The demand for those books which treat of the trades and arts, especially those dealing with electricity and the application of steam, is very great. No sooner is one of these books put on the shelves than they are taken out."

Mr. Crunden then took down some of the volumes which had been purchased during the past year, but which dealt with what might be called heavy subjects. John Flak's "Critical and Historical Essays" has been in demand since its publication.

The commendation which President Roosevelt gave to Wagner's "The Simple Life" has kept it in the hands of the patrons.

Podmore's "Modern Spiritualism" evidently has been studied a number of times by different people since it was purchased, the first of the year. "The Principles of Organic Chemistry" was purchased in June and had been out twelve times. A strictly trade book, called "The Bakers' Book," did not go upon the shelves until October 31, but was out three times in the month.

It might naturally be supposed that "Trig-rig-rig Farming," by Wilcox, would not interest many people who live in St. Louis, yet during the six months it has been in

the library it has been taken out twenty times.

Students of history, judging from the demand for the book, considered "The Impenetrable" and "Trial of Andrew Johnson" worthy of perusal.

And so on. Good books of all kinds are in demand at the Public Library. Standard works are more sought after than the new. Professional, historical and scientific volumes are always welcomed by a clientele that does not do much talking, but does much thinking.

Of course, the character of the patronage of the Mercantile Library is of a different sort than that of the Public Library. Its membership is composed of persons who have the leisure to read and who, perhaps, have traveled and studied more.

"Such novels as 'The One Woman,' 'The Pillage of Bait,' 'The Bar Sinister,' 'The Call of the Wild,' 'The Heart of Hyacinth,' 'The Spenders' and 'The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come' have been the favorites here during the past year," said Miss Simon, who is in charge of the information bureau. "The members are posted on the new books and seem to have a desire to keep up with them."

"I cannot say that the older and standard books excel them in demand."

"Of other books those of travel seem

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to have the greatest attractions for the readers. Books dealing with unknown countries are seemingly the most popular. Even Hedin's "Through Central Asia and Tibet" and "Through Unknown Tibet" can hardly be kept in the library, so great is the demand for them. London's "Through Forbidden Lands," which deals with much the same country, is also a favorite.

"The Duke of Abruzzi's latest book of travel is 'On the Polar Star to the Arctic Sea,' and it has met with the full approval of readers. Any good book of travel is sought after by the members. Historical works, such as Flak's, are also in demand by the more studious."

"Still, fiction takes precedence over all other forms of literature. The fact that 63 per cent of the calls are for fiction shows the strong hold it has upon the popular mind."

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